

Memorandum to the File Case Closure

Alleged Improper Speaking Engagement and Acceptance of Gifts
VA Acquisition Academy, Frederick, MD
(2013-02784-IQ-0156)

VA OIG Administrative Investigations Division investigated allegations that Ms. (b) (7)(C) (b) (7)(C) (b) (7)(C) VA Acquisition Academy (VAAA), and Ms. (b) (7)(C) (b) (7)(C) (b) (7)(C), VA Acquisition Internship School (VAAIS), improperly accepted lodging and a speaking engagement in Austin, TX, during March 17-20, 2013. To assess these allegations, we interviewed Ms. (b) (7)(C) Ms. (b) (7)(C) and Mr. (b) (7)(C) (b) (7)(C). We reviewed email, personnel, and travel records, as well as Federal laws, regulations, and VA policy.

Standards

Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch state that an employee shall not, directly or indirectly, solicit or accept a gift from a prohibited source or given because of the employee's official position. It defines a gift as any gratuity, favor, discount, entertainment, hospitality, loan, forbearance, or other item having monetary value. It includes services as well as gifts of training, transportation, local travel, lodgings and meals, whether provided in-kind, by purchase of a ticket, payment in advance, or reimbursement after the expense has been incurred. Further, it states that an employee shall not receive compensation from any source other than the Government for teaching, speaking, or writing that relates to the employee's official duties. 5 CFR §§ 2635.202, 203(b), and 807. VA policy requires all VA employees to use the Individual Billed Account (IBA) Travel Card to pay for authorized official travel expenses. VA Government Travel Charge Card Program, Volume XVI, Chapter 2, (October 2011).

Background

Ms. (b) (7)(C) told us that she worked for VA between (b) (7)(C) and 2010 as the (b) (7)(C) at VAAIS and that in January (b) (7)(C) she returned to VA as the (b) (7)(C) at VAAA. Ms. (b) (7)(C) told us that she started her career at VA in June (b) (7)(C) as a (b) (7)(C) and that she currently held the position of VAAIS (b) (7)(C).

The VA Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction (OALC) stated that VAAA aligned under OALC to address growing VA and government-wide acquisition workforce challenges and recent mandates by the Office of Federal Procurement Policy to meet required certification standards for the acquisition workforce. VAAIS is one of five Divisions with VAAA.

Alleged Improper Acceptance of Gifts and Gratuities

Mr. (b) (7)(C) told us that he authorized Ms. (b) (7)(C) predecessor to participation in the Chief Learning Officer (CLO) organization about 4 years ago, and Ms. (b) (7)(C) participation was an extension of that authorization to participate in this CLO forum. A March 7, 2013, email reflected that Ms. (b) (7)(C) registered to attend the CLO Symposium scheduled to begin on March 18, 2013, in Lost Pines, TX. The email reflected that this conference was "designed to provide executive attendees with a vehicle to learn about best practices, tips, techniques, and tools that enable successful corporate learning." Mr. (b) (7)(C) told us that the conference was recognized as the flagship magazine, network of publications, electronic media, and world-wide events. He said that membership and participation in CLO forums provided VAAA leaders with the knowledge and strategies needed to meet VA acquisition and supply-chain objectives. He further said that a primary OALC mission was to develop the VA acquisition workforce through involvement with CLO to continue successful performance.

Travel records reflected that Ms. (b) (7)(C) and Ms. (b) (7)(C) traveled to Austin, TX, (the nearest airport to Lost Pines) between March 17 and March 20, 2013, and that VA paid for all their expenses for this travel. Ms. (b) (7)(C) told us that she traveled to Austin to attend the CLO Symposium and to visit the VA Office of Acquisition Operations (OAO). In a March 8, 2013, email to Ms. (b) (7)(C), OAO, Ms. (b) (7)(C) told Ms. (b) (7)(C) of her and Ms. (b) (7)(C) travel to Austin and their intention to visit the OAO facility in Austin. Ms. (b) (7)(C) also told us that her supervisor, Mr. (b) (7)(C) approved the travel.

Ms. (b) (7)(C) told us that no one offered, nor did she accept, any gifts or gratuities from any private entity and that VA paid for all her travel expenses. Travel and travel card records reflected that Ms. (b) (7)(C) used her VA-issued travel card to pay for lodging. She also said that no one, outside of VA, offered to pay for any of her travel to Austin. Mr. (b) (7)(C) told us that he approved Ms. (b) (7)(C) travel to Austin, and he said that her travel was absolutely legitimate, prudent, and necessary in the course of her duties as a senior executive. He said that her travel included attending the CLO Symposium and a courtesy visit to the OAO facility in Austin. Mr. (b) (7)(C) further said that Ms. (b) (7)(C) responsibilities included training all contracting professionals in VA as well as VA's acquisition intern program.

Ms. (b) (7)(C) told us that she traveled to Austin with Ms. (b) (7)(C) to attend the CLO Symposium and to visit the OAO facility. She said that she used her personal credit card for lodging, because her VA-issued travel card limit was reduced to \$1, due to her infrequent travel. She further said that VA reimbursed her for all travel expenses and that no private entity offered her any gifts or gratuities or to pay her travel expenses for her Austin trip.

Alleged Improper Acceptance of Speaking Engagement

In reference to Ms. (b) (7)(C) and Ms. (b) (7) allegedly improperly participating in a speaking engagement during their Austin trip, Ms. (b) (7)(C) told us that professional associations and other Government agencies invited VAAA to speak at conferences associated with the acquisition industry, such as the CLO Symposium. She said that part of her duties included speaking about the work done at VAAA and that VAAA generated revenue from other Government agencies who received VAAA training. Ms. (b) (7)(C) further said that she received no remuneration from this speaking engagement.

Ms. (b) (7)(C) told us that VAAA's commitment to participate at the CLO Symposium was made prior to her January 2013 arrival at VA. In a February 8, 2013, email, Mr. (b) (7)(C), asked that Ms. (b) (7)(C) or Ms. (b) (7) participate in the Symposium on his behalf, as he had a scheduling conflict and could not attend. Ms. (b) (7)(C) and Ms. (b) (7) told us that they and a Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) employee presented at the Symposium and that it provided an opportunity for VAAA to share its work. Ms. (b) (7)(C) said that PWC made an independent decision to attend and learn what best practices were occurring in the industry and that VA did not pay for PWC employees to attend.

Conclusion

We did not substantiate that Ms. (b) (7)(C) or Ms. (b) (7) accepted any gifts while on official travel to Austin, TX, or that either improperly presented at the CLO Symposium. Although Ms. (b) (7) used her personal credit card for this travel, due to the limit on her VA contractor-issued travel card being reduced to \$1, we explained to Ms. (b) (7) that it only took a telephone call to the contractor to re-establish the higher credit limit for any future travel. We are therefore closing this investigation without issuing a formal report or memorandum.

Prepared By: _____

(b) (7)(C)

11-7-13
Date

Approved: _____

11/7/13
Date